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TAGS: [AFIN](#) [AEMR](#) [AMGT](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [KFLO](#) [CU](#)

SUBJECT: Havana Lessons Learned from Hurricane Ike

Ref: State 98095

1. USINT Havana's EAC met on September 12 to discuss lessons learned from Hurricane Ike. As requested in reftel, post reports on what was learned specific to requesting and implementing authorized departure.

2. USINT's EAC met on September 6 to discuss preparations for Hurricane Ike should its eventual track include Havana. The EAC determined that it wanted to wait until more information was available on the storm's track before a decision was made on authorized departure. In the meantime, employees were asked about their interest in authorized departure to be reported to the EAC the next day.

3. The EAC reconvened on September 7. Overnight, the storm had strengthened and its track was forecast to move over Havana. Several employees had expressed interest in authorized departure with one family confirmed that they would take advantage should it be granted. The EAC decided to request authorized departure based on this information.

LESSONS LEARNED

4. Post has determined that there were several factors that led to only one TDY staff member departing prior to the storm: inability to confirm seat reservations for charter flights during the weekend, sudden cancellations of flights, misconceptions about authorized departure and amount of time away from post, passports awaiting Cuban visas at the Ministry of Exterior (MINREX), and concerns about the protection of family pets and personal property.

5. Post has determined that any decision regarding authorized departure will be made no less than 72 hours in advance of an incoming storm with enough lead time to make flight arrangements. Post is working with U.S. charter companies and with foreign commercial airlines on contacts and flight schedules so that prompt decisions can be made on where to fly evacuees.

6. (SBU) Post management is working on a fact sheet to educate employees and their family members on authorized departure so they can have an informed determination made for their family prior to any future emergencies. Post is also working with WHA/CCA on the issue of the large number of passports of staff and family members typically awaiting multiple entry Cuban visas from the MINREX. While post would have made every effort to obtain the return of the thirty-three passports from the Cuban government for potential evacuees, there is a sense that some families may have felt they had no option of departing as they were without passports or if they did depart, renewing their visas in CUBINT in the U.S. would take longer than the authorized departure time.

7. In conclusion, post has reviewed and will be tightening its evacuation tripwires and procedures in the event that another serious storm or other emergency affects Havana.

